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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABU DHABI 003094

SIPDIS

STATE FOR G/TIP, INL, DRL, NEA/RA, NEA/ARP, SA/PB AND  
PA/PRS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/12/14

TAGS: PHUM PREL TC PK BG

SUBJECT: UAE TO BE FEATURED IN HBO CAMEL JOCKEY EXPOSE

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Post has learned from two regional NGOs that HBO television will soon broadcast a documentary alleging that UAE camel racetracks continue to use foreign children as camel jockeys, despite the UAEG's September 2002 ban forbidding this practice. The program may also highlight miserable living and working conditions for the camel jockeys, and allege other types of serious abuses. Action request for PA/PRS contained in paragraph 5. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On September 10, Poloff learned that the UAE will be featured in an upcoming (no date given) HBO expose on the UAE's continued use of foreign children as camel jockeys. Ansar Burney, head of the Karachi-based NGO Ansar Burney Welfare Trust International, said the program will highlight the "plight of these children," including their poor living and working conditions and systematic physical abuse. He offered no specific details of the possible content of the HBO program, although his organization worked with HBO's producers.

¶3. (C) Burney said his organization has also made a documentary based on 22 hours of video highlighting the miserable living and working conditions of young foreign camel jockeys. It depicts sexual abuse, severe beatings, use of electric shock, and other punishments. Burney alleged to Poloff that the abuse is UAE-wide and done with the full complicity of the UAEG. He said the government looks the other way because camel farms, where the abuses largely occur, are owned primarily by ruling families and other Emirati elites. Burney travels regularly to the UAE to "rescue" camel jockeys, with the assistance of the Pakistani Embassy. His last trip was in early September

when he rescued 23 Pakistani boys, bringing the total number of boys repatriated with his assistance this year alone to 63. His mission was reported widely in the UAE press.

¶4. (C) Salma Ali, Executive Director of the Dhaka-based NGO Bangladesh National Womens' Lawyers Association (BNWLA), informed Poloff on September 11 that her NGO has also worked with HBO television on the documentary. She said she does not know when the tape will air. BNWLA also worked with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation two years ago to produce a similar exposé, broadcast in February 2003. BNWLA has advocated a total ban on using foreign children (especially Bangladeshi children) as camel jockeys, and regularly works with other concerned international advocacy bodies, including the UN, ILO, and the NGO Anti-Slavery International.

¶5. (U) Action request for PA/PRS: Post would appreciate it if PA would check with HBO to determine whether HBO in fact is planning to broadcast a documentary on this subject, as alleged. If so, we would appreciate getting a copy of the tape and/or a transcript of the program, if possible.

SISON